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TAGS: PREL OFDP OPRC PO

SUBJECT: IF YOU WANT A FRIEND IN WASHINGTON, GET A WATER DOG

¶1. SUMMARY. Media reports that the Obama family may be interested in acquiring a Portuguese Water Dog have excited the press and the dog-loving Portuguese public. Some two months ago, the regional tourism authority in southern Portugal offered a Water Dog to the First Family, and representatives have since sought information from post as to whether a decision has been made on a First Pet. If the White House is inclined to accept the offer of a Portuguese Water Dog, post would be happy to assist in any way. End Summary.

WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?

¶2. When the US media in January revealed that the First Family was possibly interested in acquiring a Portuguese Water dog, Embassy Lisbon was inundated with e-mails from the Portuguese press and Water Dog lovers. The Portuguese are paying close attention to all things related to the new US administration, for example dedicating several media articles to the fact that a new White House photographer, Pete Sousa, is of Portuguese descent.

¶3. The Algarve Tourism Authority --a reputable public organization in southern Portugal's Algarve region-- contacted post in January to offer a Water Dog to the First Family. We passed along this offer and we understand the Portuguese Embassy in Washington also delivered a letter on the subject on January 21.

EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY

¶4. Nuno Aires, Vice-President of the Algarve Tourism Authority, has followed up with Embassy officers to advise that his organization would be honored to present a Portuguese Water Dog (in Portuguese: "Cao d'Agua Portugues") to the First Family, pointing out that the Algarve is considered the breed's homeland.

¶5. The breed's lines go back centuries. In 1297, a monk wrote of a dying sailor being pulled from the ocean by a dog with a "black coat of rough hair, cut to the first rib and with a tuft on the tip of his tail." The breed declined with the Portuguese fishing industry in the 20th century until there were only a few dozen animals in Portugal by the 1970s. In 1981, the Water Dog was listed by the Guinness Book as the rarest breed in the world. There are now over 4,000 Water Dogs registered in Portugal. Water Dogs are even-tempered, good with children, do not shed, and are hypoallergenic.

¶6. According to Mr. Aires, there is a center for breeding and raising Water Dogs in Portugal's Ria Formosa Natural Park. He points out that the center has been facing budget difficulties and that if the First Family accepts this gift, the attendant publicity and interest "will be helping to protect the Portuguese Water Dog." The Algarve Tourism Authority would be eager to provide either a puppy, young animal, or adult Water Dog.

¶7. Post stands ready to provide further information and to

work with the enthusiastic Portuguese breeders, should the White House be interested in this offer. We can confirm that acceptance of a Water Dog would generate enormous positive publicity and goodwill for the US administration in Portugal.

For more reporting from Embassy Lisbon and information about Portugal, please see our Intelink site:

http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/portal:port_ugal

STEPHENSON